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ABSTRACT

About 36,500 infants die each year in the United States, due largely to low birth weight and inadequate prenatal care. The United States ranks twenty-second among the world's nations in infant mortality. This brochure addresses the high infant mortality rate in the United States compared to other developed nations, and notes actions that prospective parents and others can take to reduce infant mortality. It also explains the Healthy Start Program, designed to lower the infant mortality rate through the provision of health and social services, local outreach programs, and parent education. The first goal is to reduce infant deaths in 15 selected communities that have alarmingly high rates of infant mortality. The brochure recommends that concerned individuals encourage pregnant women to seek adequate prenatal care, and that women who are planning a pregnancy or who are already pregnant should visit their doctor or clinic regularly. A list of eight national organizations that provide information about prenatal and newborn care is included. (MDM)

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Every Ch... Deserves a HEALTHY START

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Q **Doesn't the United States have the healthiest babies in the world?**

No. Not by a long shot. About 36,500 infants die each year in the U.S. And there are 21 countries where babies have a better chance of living to celebrate their first birthday than babies born here.

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Q Why are babies dying?

Most often, it is because they are born too soon and too small–less than 5 1/2 lbs. (called "low birthweight"). Each year about 284,000 underweight babies are born in the U.S.

Q How does this affect me?

It means that you or someone you know may give birth to a baby too small and too sick to make it through the first year of life. We all share in paying the high medical care costs–more than $2,000 each day–for these babies.

Q How can we help more babies get a healthy start?

The best way to make sure babies are healthier is for all pregnant women to get early and continual health care (called "prenatal care") and the necessities of life–nutritious food, adequate housing, and support from family and friends.

Also, it's especially important for a woman who is pregnant–or even planning to become pregnant–not to smoke, drink alcohol, or take drugs, and to talk to her health care provider about prescription drugs.

Q Is anything being done to help women have healthy babies?

Absolutely. In fact, there are many people who care, and many programs for women and babies–like Healthy Start–that are working to make sure that all babies have a strong and healthy beginning. Find out more about what these programs are doing to help on the next page.

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What is Healthy Start?

Healthy Start is a federal government program to help lessen the number of babies who die (called "infant mortality") in the U.S. The first goal is reducing infant deaths in 15 selected communities that have alarmingly high rates of infant mortality. Special grants will help these communities expand health and social services and make it easier for women to get care for themselves and their babies.

The Healthy Start communities include: Baltimore, MD, Birmingham, AL, Boston, MA, Chicago, IL, Cleveland, OH, Detroit, MI, Lake County, IN, New Orleans, LA, New York, NY, Northern Plains Indian communities, Oakland, CA, Philadelphia, PA, Pittsburgh, PA, Pee Dee Region, SC, and Washington, DC.

In these Healthy Start communities and in numerous other programs throughout the nation, clinics, schools, churches, media, neighborhood organizations and committed individuals are combining strengths to devise creative approaches for improving the health of mothers and babies. Their efforts include providing health and social services (e.g., helping women with housing needs), doing neighborhood outreach to help women learn about services and prenatal care, and offering education about childbirth and infant care.

Improving maternal and child health is an important national priority. The federal government continues to invest billions of dollars in maternal and child health programs, such as Medicaid and the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) nutrition program.

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What can you do?

— If you know someone who is pregnant...help her get the care she needs. Help her find or get to a doctor or clinic as early as possible. Be there when she needs help, or just needs someone to listen.

— If you are planning to get pregnant or you are pregnant...and you have not started prenatal care, call for an appointment with your health care provider today. Keep all of your prenatal care appointments, and follow the good advice from your caregiver...for your sake, and the health of your baby.

If you need help finding care for yourself or someone you know, call your local or state health department and ask for the office that handles maternal and child health programs. States now have toll free phone lines to assist women in finding care.

— Talk to everyone you know about how important it is that all pregnant women get prenatal care. Ask any groups that you belong to (civic, fraternal, religious) to support and become involved in improving the health of pregnant women and babies in your community.

— Call or write the national organizations listed at the end of this brochure–or their local chapters–to find out how you can support activities for pregnant women and children and to find out how they can get the care they need.

What does every pregnant woman need?

1. Prenatal care–from a doctor or clinic–as early as possible, and regularly during pregnancy.

2. Special care. During pregnancy, a woman needs to eat a variety of healthful foods each day. She may also need information about preparing for childbirth and taking care of a newborn. She does not need tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs; they can harm her baby.

3. Help and support from family and friends. Pregnancy brings many changes. It can be a happy time for families, a time of hope and joy. But a woman who is pregnant also may be tired, under stress, and need help to get the care she needs or just to get through her day.

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Who can you contact?

Write to the American Academy of Pediatrics (P.O. Box 927, Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0927) for additional information on access to health care.

Write toThe American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) (409 12th Street SW, Washington, DC 20024, Attention: Resource Center) for single free copies of pamphlets on prenatal care.

Write to the Children's Defense Fund (25 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001) for information on public policy affecting children's health.

Write or call the Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition (409 12th Street, SW, Washington, DC 20024-2188, 202-863-2458) to find out how to link up with local coalitions and mobilize your community to promote quality prenatal care.

Write to the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation (1275 Mamaroneck Avenue, White Plains, NY 10605) about volunteer activities and for referrals to prenatal care and community programs.

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- Write to the National Maternal and Child Health Clearinghouse (8201 Greensborough Drive, Suite 600, McLean, VA 22102) for a free single copy of *Infant Care*, a guide for new parents.
- Write to the National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Service Organizations (COSSMHO) (1501 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036) for information on Hispanic maternal and child health.
- Write to the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality (Switzer Building, 330 C Street, SW, Room 2014, Washington, DC 20201) about the health and education policies and services every community should have for mothers and children.

Call your state health department (usually in the capital city) and ask for the office that handles maternal and child health issues. Every state has a toll free phone line for prenatal care referrals for low income women. Also check with your local health department to see if there are activities they know of in your area.

Call your local community hospital. They may have a range of programs and services for pregnant women and newborns. As part of its commitment to serve the community, a hospital has classes, materials, and other services often for free or for a small fee.

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